

Colossians 3:12-15

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Paul gives some examples of what it means to think and act according to the things above. And what binds them all together.

In verses 5-8 and 9-11 of Chapter 3, Paul instructs the Colossian believers to put aside things that are not in alignment with Christ and the Kingdom of God. Here in verse 12, he turns his focus toward putting on those things which are in alignment with Christ. When the dirty clothes (lusts, passions) are taken off, the new clothes are to be put on. In each case, the illustration of taking clothes off or putting them on demonstrates that an act of the will is required.

This is not to secure the gift of eternal life, but to gain the full benefit of that gift. This is similar to God requiring Israel to walk in obedience to Him in order to possess the Promised Land He had granted. The believer must make a decision to take action, to walk in obedience in order to possess that which has been granted. As with any action, this act of the will is shaped by choosing a perspective rooted in what is true and real (things above—see commentaries on [Colossians 3:1-4](#) and [Colossians 3:5-8](#)) rather than false and illusory (things below).

Verse 11 of the previous section ends by proclaiming that the Kingdom of Heaven is open to all because “Christ is all and is in all.” This passage begins with the conjunction *so*, or therefore. Meaning, “because of this...” If Christ is all and is in all, it ought to lead to the actions Paul describes thereafter.

Paul reminds the Colossians to act *as those who have been chosen of God*. Remember, Paul is writing this letter to established believers (Colossians 1:2). He is not trying to convert unbelievers. He is trying to remind believers struggling with sin and the false ways of the world (as all believers do) of who they are in Christ and what their faith should look like when lived out. He is exhorting them to use their capacity to make choices in a manner that reflects their true self and that lead to their true self-interest.

The Colossian Christians have been *chosen by God*. This is a euphemism used here to refer to believers in Christ. In the Old Testament, the Jewish people were God’s chosen ones. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ has opened the door to all people of all nations to be God’s chosen, through faith in Christ.

Paul also reminds the Colossians that they are *holy* and *beloved*. This is in spite of their sinfulness. As we learned in the last chapter, all their sins are already nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). Therefore, Jesus has paid the full price for every sin. The word *holy* means pure or blameless. The Colossians are holy and blameless in God’s sight because of what Jesus did for them on the cross.

It is not then because the Colossians do everything perfectly that they are fully accepted in God’s sight, but because Christ is *holy* on their behalf. The pressure to perform, to be perfect, in order

to be accepted by God is removed. Each believer is fully accepted because of the free gift of being justified in God's sight through Jesus (Romans 5:15-16).

The question is not whether the Colossians are fully accepted by God, they are. The question is whether they will now walk in the reality of their position in Christ, or continue to walk in the ways of their old man. Even though every Colossian is fully accepted in Christ, there are still consequences for their actions. Their actions will lead to an experience of life (connection, that comes from obedience) or death (separation, that stems from disobedience).

Because of the new power they have in Christ, they can work out of holiness rather than toward it. And they are *loved*. They are unconditionally accepted by God. God sees them as He sees Christ. He cares for them as His children. As their Heavenly Father, He now wants them to make good choices. Choices that lead to life and benefit.

God does not take away the choices of believers; to do so would be to diminish their humanity. Rather, God provides many avenues of instruction, that believers might be informed how to make the best choices. He gives us His word, as in this letter written by Paul and preserved through the centuries. He gives us the Holy Spirit who directs us in the ways of life (Romans 8:15-16). He gives us the reality of cause/effect in nature (Romans 1:20).

So, the Colossians are *chosen, holy, and loved*. Paul is celebrating them. Pumping them up. It is much more effective to celebrate the true good in people and encourage them to fan the flame of that goodness than it is to cover them with shame and condemnation. In fact, Paul states in his letter to the Romans that there is no condemnation remaining for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1).

In order that the Colossian believers might live in a manner that leads them to fully experience the great gifts they have been given, Paul now tells them how to "put on new clothes." By making a deliberate choice to take actions in obedience to God's ways, each believer will gain an experience of life, harmony, peace, and fulfillment. They will be living according to the design God intended, and thereby gaining the maximum benefit from their experience on earth.

With all of this encouragement in tow, Paul instructs the Colossian believers to *put on a heart of compassion*. Taking off all of the behaviors that Paul lists in the previous verses just leaves people in neutral. It is not enough to stand there naked, stripped of evil behavior. It must be replaced with good behavior that is intentionally in alignment with Christ. The word for *put on* here is the Greek word "endyo." It means "to sink into," literally like putting clothes on (it is used of the new man in verse 10). Having compassion for others is a matter of action.

The word for *heart* in the phrase *put on a heart of compassion* is a translation of the Greek word "splagchnon," which means something closer to "bowels" or "intestines." It is likely a metaphor for all of the inner self. This emphasizes that each of these actions taken begins with choosing an inner perspective. Paul desires believers to choose a perspective that following God's ways leads to life and benefit for themselves. Further, he wants them to choose a perspective that believes that following the ways of the world is self-destructive and leads to addiction and misery.

Paul lists five things that attend and perhaps even make up the believer's intestines or inner self. These are things that must be put on in order to live a life of consistency and alignment with Christ.

The first is *compassion*. The Greek word here is sometimes translated "mercy." *Compassion* is the ability to see the station of another and act in their true best interest. Once we see the perspective of others, we are well suited to extend grace and forgiveness. We are also well suited to take actions that seek their best interest. That might include telling them things they would prefer not to hear. We can avoid enabling self-destructive behaviors, and offer to lead them to the ways of life. We can do this while honoring the sovereignty God granted them to make their own choices.

The second word listed is *kindness*. This is not about being nice. Niceness is typically self-seeking; we are trying to behave in such a way as to gain the acceptance of others. *Kindness* involves doing constructive things for others, even if they cannot reciprocate, and even if they might reject our offer. The Greek word for kindness, "chrestotes," is closer to our word for "integrity" than the idea of being polite or nice. One translation of "chrestotes" is "usefulness." Paul is not encouraging superficial positivity. He wants us to commit to taking actions that actually seek the benefit of others, without regard to what they might do to us or think of us in return.

By advocating *kindness*, Paul is asking the Colossians to act in the way that is most useful to their fellow man. To do good, to act with integrity, according to biblical values of truth and love. To lead people in a way that honors the reality of the cause/effect world God gave us to steward. We often think of being kind as a way of saying, "don't be a jerk." But it is much more than that. It is about being useful to others in a manner that is constructive for them and for the shared community.

The third word on the list is *humility*. This is another word that is commonly misunderstood (like kindness). *Humility* is about seeing things the way they are—embracing reality and acting according to reality. Paul could equally say, "see truly." The task of humility is to observe and internalize reality, no more and no less. Moses is a great example of humility. Scripture says he was the humblest man in all the earth (Numbers 12:3). Moses was frank and direct about the people he led, the role he was assigned to play, and the nature and reality of God.

The fourth word in the list is *gentleness*. This is the Greek word "prautes" and is variously translated as "meekness," "every consideration," and "humility." There are several instances that provide a context:

- In 2 Timothy, Paul mentors Timothy to correct those who are in error "with gentleness ('prautes') so that they will be more inclined to come to a knowledge of the truth.
- In Titus 3:2, believers are exhorted to show "every consideration ('prautes') for all men" rather than to behave in a manner that is foolish.
- In James 1:21, believers are told to receive God's implanted word in humility ("prautes").
- In James 3:13, Believers are exhorted to demonstrate wisdom and understanding by exhibiting good deeds in the gentleness ("prautes") of wisdom.

- In 1 Peter 3:15, believers are exhorted to be ready to give a defense of the hope that is within them, but to do so with gentleness (“prautes”) and reverence.

The basic picture that emerges is that “prautes” carries the idea of standing in someone else’s shoes. It might include knowing what tone of voice to use, how much or little to press, or what vocabulary to use in order to best mentor, disciple, or exhort them. It is dealing with others with wisdom, having listened to them intently enough to understand them, and meet them where they are. Consistent with the entire list, *gentleness* focuses on the best interest of the other person rather than their response toward you.

Jesus consistently challenged those whom He encountered in order to lead them to life (their best interest). But He did so in the manner they needed in order to give them the opportunity to hear, in *gentleness*. With the Pharisees He was blunt and confrontational (Matthew 23:25-26). With the Samaritan woman Jesus was provocative as well as confrontational, and she heard (John 4:7-25). With the Roman centurion He was complimentary (Matthew 8: 10).

The last word on the list is *patience*. It could also be translated “long-suffering.” To be patient is to be willing to wait, hope, and choose delayed gratification rather than instant gratification. These traits all work together. For example, when you correct someone in *gentleness* (“prautes”), you may also need patience in allowing them time to respond. *Patience* is setting aside being annoyed, often because “I am not getting my way in the manner and time frame in which I expected it,” and choosing instead to be content with other’s choices and circumstances beyond our control.

To be *patient* is to choose to put the details of life into an eternal perspective. In this way we can see how suffering enhances the experience of life, as this life is our one and only opportunity to know God by faith. Choosing an eternal perspective allows us to have hope for things we long for but that are not yet fully realized.

By definition, we only have the opportunity to exhibit patience when we are in the presence of circumstances that are annoying, inconvenient, or disagreeable. To be patient requires choosing a perspective that “this is an opportunity to serve, to be kind, to be helpful, etc.” rather than venting or descending into a fit of rage.

In that vein, Paul says, *bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone*. The word for *bearing* is “anecho” and it means “holding up.” So, the call is to support *one another* rather than tear *one another* down. To suffer alongside *one another* as fellow pilgrims in this life. And when a wrong is done, when there is *a complaint against anyone*, to be in the practice of *forgiving one another*.

The idea of *forgiving one another* is to take disputes, sadness, and disappointments as opportunities to bond together rather than allowing them to drive a wedge between us. This requires a decision, a choice, to not take things personally when there is *a complaint* against you. It is choosing a perspective that, “This is not about me, it is about us, our journey together.” It is recognizing our true self-interest is in *forgiving one another* rather than harboring resentment.

To be *forgiving of one another* means we focus on what we can do for others and what we can do together, rather than focusing on what others can or “ought” to do for us. Rather than “file grievances” to gain that to which we claim to be entitled, we assume responsibility to invest in others. As the Lord has blessed us, so we choose to bless others, in obedience to His commands.

Paul reminds the Colossian believers: *just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you forgive others*. Living in alignment with Christ means, to the best of our ability, doing things the way He did them. Christ forgave. He even forgave those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). He is our example. Our goal and destiny is to be conformed to His image (Romans 8:29). Therefore, we ought to forgive others. Christ perceived suffering as an opportunity to edify others and bring to life in this world the Kingdom of God (Philippians 2:5-9). So should we. It is the way to life.

Paul sums up this list (and the heart behind it) by concluding, *beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity*. The Greek word for *beyond* is “epi.” It is a preposition that means something like “on” or “over.” It is a term of superimposition, meaning that what follows (*love*) covers over *all these things*.

Love is the essence of the gospel message, out of which all of *these things* flow. It is *the perfect bond of unity*. To be perfect, as it is used here, is to be complete. Standing alone, each of the things in Paul’s list could be perverted, used to an extreme at the expense of the others, or made an idol out of. Love prevents this. Love works like a bag, collecting these good things into one place and keeping them together so that they do not float away from one another. This *unity* of purpose, *love*, enables us to put on all of these things at once.

The *love* that is spoken of here is a translation of the Greek word “agape.” “Agape” is one of several Greek words translated to English as “love.” As used in the Bible, “agape” *love* is a love of choice, based on values. This is evident in passages like 1 Corinthians, which describes “agape” love in terms of choice and action:

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”
(1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

The thing that binds all together is making a choice to seek the things above as a priority over the things below. To seek the lasting and fulfilling rewards that come from following Christ instead of choosing the fleeting, and ultimately self-destructive, rewards offered by the world. In short, to choose *love*.

Paul further exhorts the Colossians, *let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful*. It is likely here that the very Jewish Paul had in mind the Hebrew notion of “Shalom” when he speaks here of *peace*. Shalom is much broader than mere tranquility. Shalom is the notion of all things working together according to its design. It is a harmony of spirit, soul, and nature. Shalom transcends, but does not ignore, circumstances.

It is a state of being. In this fallen world, Shalom will not occur physically this side of Jesus's return. But we can have Shalom, *peace, rule in our hearts*.

This is, again, a choice to *let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts*. We do this when we choose to be *thankful*, even when circumstances are not what we prefer. We do this when we willingly play our role for the benefit of others, as we were *called in one body*. We do this when we refuse to insist that the body conform to our desires and appetites.

We *let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts* when we willingly take on responsibility to do what we can do at every opportunity, trusting Christ will care for the things we cannot control. We do what we can, when we can, to serve the greater cause of Christ and one another.

When we take this attitude, we are one in our hearts, because we have given over *rule in our hearts* to Christ. We have *peace* in our hearts, because we have chosen a path of obedience to Christ, living our true reality as stewards of the grace of God (1 Peter 4:10).

No one can stop us from choosing to do anything Paul has commanded in this chapter. No one, no thing, can keep us from forgiving, loving, seeing reality as it is, or dealing with others where they are. Therefore, frustration can be eliminated, because we are fully empowered to take each and every one of these actions. Because we accept our place in the Body, and trust Christ who is the Head, we can sidestep worry about the things outside our control.

When we choose a path of love, truth, and forgiveness, we are at *peace* in our hearts by faith. This is one of the great current rewards of walking in the way of Christ, to live in peace, even while we strive (1 Corinthians 9:24).

The Greek word for *rule* in the phrase *let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts* is "brabeuo." It means "to be an arbiter," "to decide, determine." To have authority. In addition to *rule*, the word *Let* in the phrase *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts* is also "brabeuo." The verb "brabeuo" occurs twice in this sentence, being translated *let* the first time and the second time as *rule*. In each case, it is an imperative verb, meaning it is a command. It would seem the first command is "You let" meaning "you decide to receive." The next would infer that if we "let," then Christ will rule. It is when Christ rules our hearts that we live the experience of true peace, a peace that neither opponents nor circumstances can overthrow.

"Brabeuo" (*let* and *rule*) in each case is in a passive tense, meaning it is something acting upon us. It is also singular in each case, indicating that each person is to make a choice. We make a choice to allow the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts in the first instance of "brabeuo." Then in the second instance of "brabeuo": "When you decide to receive, then the peace of Christ will act upon you and rule your heart."

The word for *heart* in the phrase *Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts* is not the same word translated as "heart" in verse 12. That one ("splanchnon") meant "bowels" or "intestines," perhaps standing for every part of our inner being. The word for *heart* here is "kardia." It is referring to that part from which every other part of us gains life. It is used to represent both the physical as well as the spiritual seat of life. *The peace of Christ*, then, should flow out from the

central part of who we are. When we choose Christ to rule our heart, this high-integrity life of love and service is what will then flow to every part of our being.

The next phrase, *to which indeed you were called in one body* is a reminder that each of the Colossian believers is called to live in unity of purpose, by serving the other members of the *body* within their gifting, just as the various members of a human body serve the whole. This is a unilateral calling. Each believer is *called* as a part of *one body*. Each believer is *called* because each believer is in Christ, and Christ is the Head of the Body (1 Corinthians 12:13-14).

To serve others with our gifts is a matter of obedience and enlightened self-interest. We are not to wait for others first, then reciprocate. We are to take the lead. We are to serve with our gifts regardless of what others might do in return (for good or ill). As a result, we can be ruled by *peace*, because no one can stop us from choosing to live according to these guidelines.

It is our choice whether to allow Christ *to rule in our hearts*. Therefore, the phrase *to which indeed you were called in one body*, begins with our individual responsibility to choose. It is when we choose to let the *peace of Christ rule in our hearts* that we put ourselves under Christ, who is the Head of the Body. We are then able to play our proper role as a member of the Body.

All this is reminding each of us that our entire body, our whole person, is called to obedience in Christ. Thus, if we desire to live the experience of Shalom (*peace*) we must make the *peace* of Christ our central heartbeat, out of which the entirety of our body operates.

This section ends with an admonishment: *and be thankful*. This is another choice. The choice to *let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts* is a passive choice, where we are allowing something to occur to us. The various choices to “put on” positive characteristics (such as love and patience) are active choices (Colossians 3:10,12). *To be thankful* is also an active choice. It is a choice to accept reality as it is, and decide that “this circumstance is good, because God placed me into it.”

We have various reminders in scripture that sometimes God chooses difficult circumstances for us, for our good. God chose difficulty for His nation Israel, to give them an opportunity to walk in humility/reality, and learn that “man does not live by bread alone, but by everything that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:1-3). Jesus cited this verse through the difficult circumstance of His Father, through the Spirit, allowing Satan to tempt Him. In doing this, and in all things, Jesus was choosing to *be thankful*, knowing that all that His Father had for Him was for His best (Philippians 2:5-9).

It is a reminder that all the opportunities we have in life will be made good and beautiful. Everything that comes into our lives is a once-in-an-existence opportunity to know by faith. It is a wonderful blessing to have the opportunity to live in alignment with Christ. We are all destined to be conformed to His image (Romans 8:29). But scripture asserts that we will gain superior life experience when by faith we choose to take advantage of the opportunity to make good choices. Jesus is consistent in asserting that acts of faith will gain great reward (Matthew 8:10-13; Revelation 22:12).

Gratefulness is a heart posture that recognizes the reality of our current station in the grander scheme of things. We will not be able to have faith in the next life; we will then know by sight. To fully embrace the incredible opportunity God has given us to come to know Him by faith allows us to be reminded of God's benevolence toward us. As Paul states to the church in Corinth, it is beyond our ability to comprehend what God has in store as a reward for those who love Him, and follow His commands (1 Corinthians 2:9).

To live in Christ is not a stuffy obligation. It is a once-in-an-existence opportunity to gain a treasure of wisdom that even the angels long to understand (Ephesians 3:10; 1 Peter 1:12). To *be thankful* is to choose this perspective. We as believers have been given the chance to participate in a meaningful life—an existence aligned with The Creator and Designer of all of life. We can play a meaningful part in redeeming a fallen world, through acting out the obedience of faith. In doing so, we can gain complete fulfillment, and a benefit that goes beyond anything we can even imagine. To choose this perspective allows us to also *be thankful*.

Biblical Text

¹² So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴ Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.